

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK**

International Refugee Assistance Project, Inc.,

Plaintiff,

V.

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services,

Defendant.

Civil Action No.: 1:20-cv-4284 (RWL)

DECLARATION OF JOANNA RUPPEL

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746, I, Joanna Ruppel, declare and state as follows:

1. I am the Chief of the International and Refugee Affairs Division (“IRAD”) in the Refugee, Asylum and International Operations Directorate (“RAIO”) of United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (“USCIS”), which is within the Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”). I began serving as Chief of the Refugee Affairs Division in an acting capacity on February 5, 2018, and then officially entered permanent status on March 18, 2018. On October 1, 2019, the Refugee Affairs Division and the International Operations Division merged to form IRAD within RAIO. Prior to my current position, I served as the Chief of the International Operations Division within USCIS/RAIO from 2008 to 2018. I have been employed by the legacy Immigration and Naturalization Service (“INS”) and then by USCIS, one of the successor agencies to INS, working in asylum, refugee and other immigration areas for over 29 years.

2. I am responsible for overseeing IRAD operations, which includes adjudication of refugee applicant adjudications around the world. I submit this declaration in support of Defendant USCIS's motion to dismiss and opposition to Plaintiff International Refugee Assistance Project Inc.'s motion for summary judgment in the above-captioned action. The statements made herein

are based on my personal knowledge and information made available to me in the course of carrying out my duties and responsibilities as Chief of IRAD.

3. The United States Department of State (“DOS”) has overall management responsibility for the United States Refugee Admissions Program (“USRAP”). USCIS plays an integral role in the USRAP, principally the interviewing and the adjudication of refugee applicants.

4. The Department of State (“DOS”) owns and maintains a system called the Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (“WRAPS”), which currently facilitates the processing and tracking of most refugee applicants as they move through the required refugee processing steps.¹ During a refugee officer’s adjudication of a refugee applicant’s case, the USCIS refugee officer may access WRAPS at different points in the process. Specifically, the refugee officer may access WRAPS after prescreening, during in-person eligibility interviews, when reviewing background and security checks results, when making eligibility determinations and when ultimately deciding whether to approve an applicant for resettlement. If a refugee officer accesses WRAPS, records he or she may review include applicant testimony, written statement(s) by the applicant, the application itself and supporting documentation, and the status of required background and security checks. Certain documents are also generated by the refugee officer during the course of the adjudication of the application, such as the refugee officer’s interview notes and decisional documents. Those documents are scanned and uploaded into WRAPS by the applicable DOS Resettlement Support Center (“RSC”) staff. By virtue of long-standing policy, USCIS maintains the confidentiality of the documents and information that USCIS receives or reviews in the course of its duties in accordance with 8 C.F.R. § 208.6(a).

¹ As discussed below, DOS is in the process of retiring WRAPS. Certain refugee case data has been migrated from WRAPS, to DOS’s new system, START.

5. There are also numerous documents maintained in WRAPS that are part of an applicant's case file that a USCIS refugee officer would not typically access for use during the course of adjudicating a refugee application. Examples include the Sponsorship Assurance Form, Boarding Letter, Selective Service Notice DS-1810, and Form I-765, *Application for Employment Authorization*.

6. If the refugee officer determines that the applicant should not be permitted to resettle in the United States, the denied refugee applicant will receive a standardized notice of ineligibility that outlines the reasons for the denial. On that notice, the refugee officer marks the appropriate reason(s) for the denial, which are described in general terms.

7. If a refugee applicant is denied, he or she may seek review of the decision by USCIS. This process is known as a request for review ("RFR") and is a discretionary process. The denied applicant must submit his or her request for review within 90 days after the denial, but USCIS has discretion to accept late filings.

8. To gain access to WRAPS, a USCIS employee must receive authorization from DOS. Refugee officers and a limited number of other individuals at USCIS have DOS's authorization to access to WRAPS. USCIS employees with authorization to access WRAPS have read-only access. Except as noted in paragraph 9 below, USCIS employees with WRAPS access cannot alter or delete documents within WRAPS.

9. The only exception to a refugee officer's read-only access is that a refugee officer may digitally approve a case in WRAPS, which is called the Digital Approval Process. If the refugee officer rejects a case for Digital Approval, the refugee officer has the limited ability to make a note to the RSC during the Digital Approval Process explaining the reason that the case is not being digitally approved. If the refugee officer identifies any errors in USCIS materials in

WRAPS, the refugee officer must e-mail the RSC directly and provide further instruction, but the refugee officer cannot make the changes in WRAPS directly. A USCIS refugee officer would not typically seek corrections to non-USCIS documents within WRAPS. Aside from the aforementioned limited ability to make a note to the RSC, refugee officers cannot make notes or alter documents within WRAPS.

10. To the extent a USCIS refugee officer annotates or drafts any documents, such as annotating the Form I-590 during the course of the interview with the applicant and creating an adjudication worksheet, these documents are later scanned and uploaded into WRAPS by RSC staff.

11. Currently, in addition to WRAPS, all I-590 decision information is stored in the paper file that is maintained by the RSC until it is shipped to the USCIS National Records Center and becomes an A-File. During the time that the file is with the RSC, WRAPS (or the system that is replacing it, START) can be searched to locate decisional information. As of April 4, 2021, certain decisional information for some RSCs is available in USCIS's own case management system, Global. In the future, this information will expand as cases are converted from WRAPS to START.

12. The Refugee Affairs Division Case Manager is a USCIS program that was originally designed to track case holds. However, the Refugee Affairs Division Case Manager was never widely adopted and was only used for a limited number of workflows. The Refugee Affairs Division Case Manager is not connected to WRAPS. Rather, certain case management tracking information, including how long a case had been pending and which cases were in need of action, were manually transferred from WRAPS to the Refugee Affairs Division Case Manager. This process was not done automatically. Instead, a report was generated from WRAPS, which was

then inputted into the Refugee Affairs Division Case Manager. The Refugee Affairs Division Case Manager is no longer used for working cases. Upon the conclusion of the retirement of WRAPS, Refugee Affairs Division Case Manager will be used for archival purposes only.

13. DOS is in the process of retiring WRAPS. WRAPS is expected to be fully decommissioned by the end of 2021. In place of WRAPS, DOS has developed START, and USCIS has developed Global.

14. USCIS has developed functionality for the Form I-590 application to be integrated into Global. USCIS is also currently implementing features in Global that will intake Form I-590 data so that USCIS refugee officers may interview and adjudicate pending cases using Global and has begun issuing approvals in the system on a limited basis. Soon, USCIS refugee officers will input in Global interview and decision information, such as interview notes and all final adjudicative decisions. Once a final decision has been made on a case, Global communicates that decision to DOS to complete processing. These features are being rolled out to cases in conjunction with the transition from WRAPS to START. DOS will be making this transition one RSC at a time every few months for the remainder of calendar year 2021. At the time of transition, information previously held in WRAPS will be moved to START and, once verified, sent to Global.

15. To date, the RSC Austria and RSC Latin America, as well as Botswana and Madagascar case data, have been transferred from WRAPS to START and Global. The remaining RSCs are expected to transfer their data maintained in WRAPS to START and Global by the end of 2021.

16. USCIS will not have access to START. START and Global will exchange relevant data, and all information USCIS needs to adjudicate refugee applications will be housed in Global.

Once all case data are migrated from WRAPS to START and Global, USCIS no longer will access WRAPS.

* * *

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Executed this 7th day of April 2021, in Camp Springs, Maryland.

Joanna Ruppel